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DEPT FOR AF/W

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/25/2017
TAGS: PGOV PREL SL
SUBJECT: HANDOVER AT THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, E.S. Pratt for reasons 1.4 (b)
and (d)

1.(SBU) On October 23 a hand over ceremony was held at the
Ministry of Foreign Affairs as Zainab Bangura took over as
Minister and former Minister, and defeated Vice Presidential
Candidate Minister Alhaji Momodu Koroma said farewell.
Outgoing Minister Koroma took the opportunity to deliver a
27-page speech outlining the activities of the Ministry
during his tenure and commenting on the state of relations
with a range of foreign countries. Koroma's summary of
bilateral relations with China, India, Malaysia, and Morocco
and other countries show that Sierra Leone is working to
develop a more intense south/south dialogue. He recommended
that Sierra Leone open diplomatic missions in India, South
Africa, Malaysia and Brazil, but recommended against opening
missions in Russia or Iran.

¶2. (SBU) Outgoing Minister Koroma took the opportunity of his
departure to list the constraints facing the Ministry
including lack of electricity, poor working conditions,
salary arrears, and usurping of diplomatic functions by the
office of the President. He appealed to the new government
to improve conditions of service, provide training,
equipment, and adopt a 50/50 policy in appointments of
political vs career Ambassadors.

China is Responsive - Iran is Not

¶3. (SBU) In an overview of bilateral relations, Koroma
described China as the most responsive bilateral partner in
Asia. He enumerated infrastructure projects that China is
involved in, including construction of a new Ministry of
Foreign Affairs building (note: which is to be located near
the new Embassy compound). Bilateral agreements in
agriculture, mining, tourism, manpower development and
military have also been signed recently. The outgoing
minister also noted that India, Korea and Japan supported
projects in Sierra Leone. However, he stated that while Iran
has promised cooperation in wide range of areas, including
banking, health, agriculture, fisheries, energy and power,
and transport, none of these projects has yet been
implemented.

New Missions Needed

¶4. (U) Koroma stated that Sierra Leone needs to reopen
diplomatic missions it closed during the war, specifically
Paris, Rome and Cairo. New missions are needed in South
Africa, India, Malaysia and Brazil as these countries are
increasingly important in economic terms. But Koroma
recommended that missions not be opened in Russia or Iran,
citing the high number of attacks by skinheads on African
diplomats in Moscow and the unfulfilled promises by the

Government of Iran on technical cooperation with Sierra Leone.

¶5. (C) Incoming Minister Zainab Bangura met with Charge and Poloff later the same day after Koroma's speech and confirmed that she concurs with the opening of new diplomatic missions. She confided that she intends to recall political ambassadors but has to seek funding from the Ministry of Finance to do so. She also commented that she fully intends to reassert the authority of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs over its foreign missions. According to her, most Sierra Leone Ambassadors had become accustomed to bypassing the Ministry and dealing directly with the President's office. She also wants to improve the professional quality of staff members and establish clearly defined responsibilities. (Comment: Bangura is a strong willed leader, with experience in the UN system as head of the civil affairs office at UNMIL in Liberia. She has been a vibrant civil society activist in Sierra Leone and is an internationally honored human rights crusader. In 2002 she became the first women to run for President. No doubt, she will bring changes to the Ministry. End comment.)

PRATT